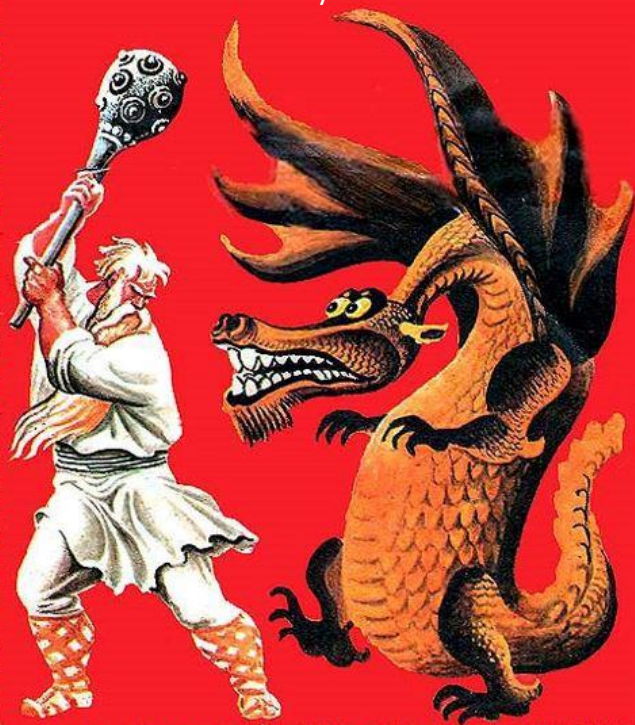
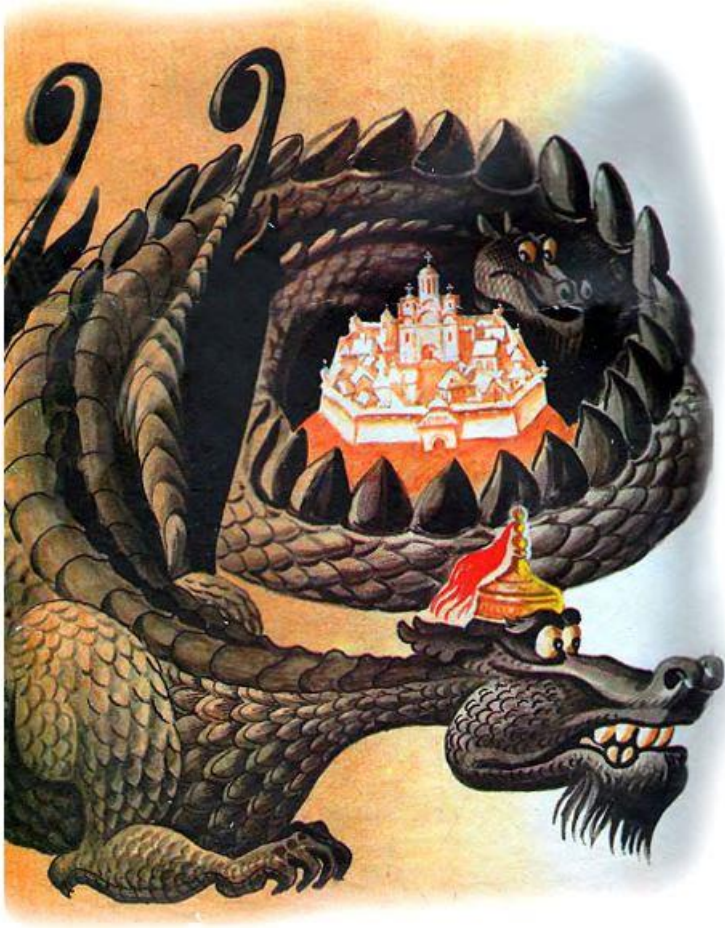


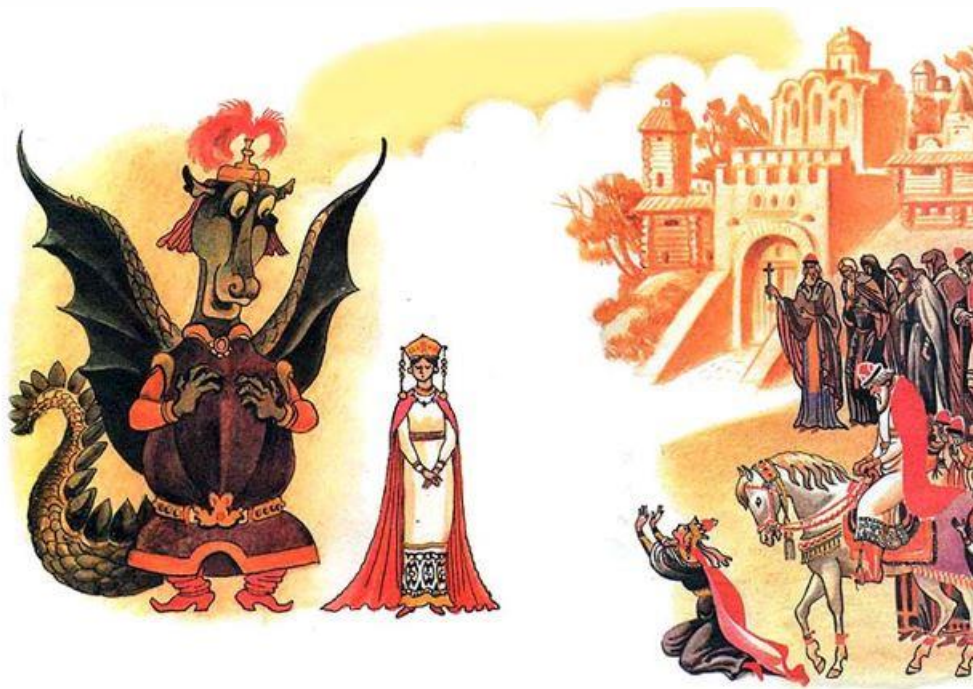
# KIRILO THE TANNER

Illustrated by S. Artushenko





In the days when there was a prince at Kiev, a Dragon dwelt beyond the town walls and exacted tribute of the townsfolk: either a man or a maid had they to give him yearly.



The turn came for the prince's own daughter to go to the Dragon, and he sent her to him, for he had to do as the townsfolk did. So lovely was the princess as words cannot say, and the Dragon fell in love with her at sight. And knowing this to be so, the princess was kind to her captor and spoke sweetly to him.

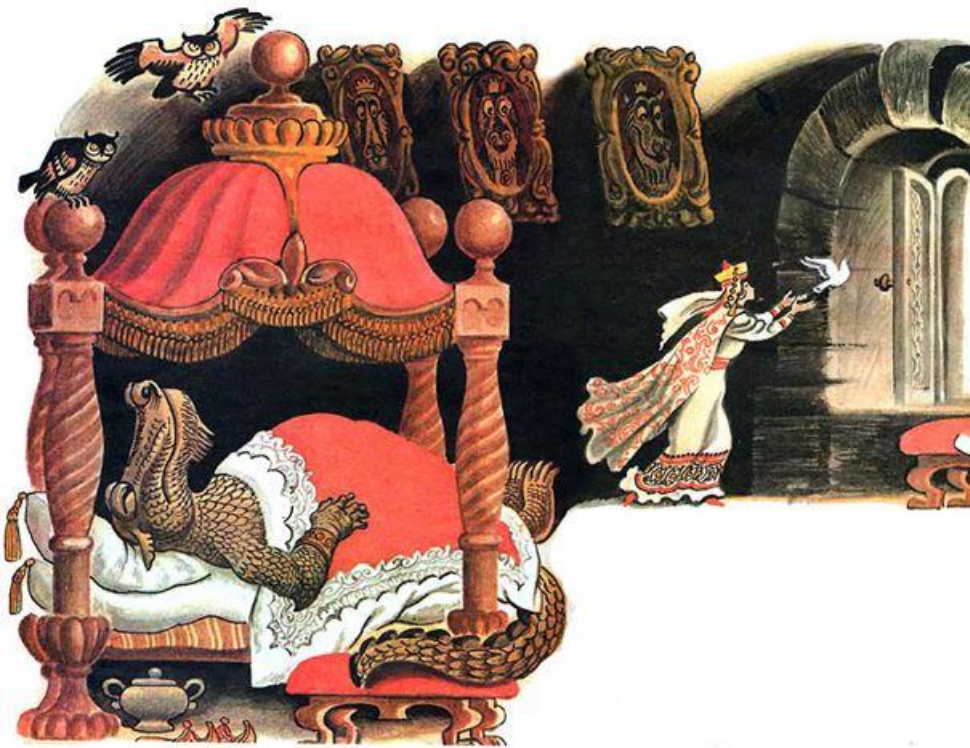
"Tell me, Dragon, is there a man anywhere on this earth who can get the better of you?" she asked him. This was when she had been with him for some days.

"There is such a man, he lives in Kiev, on the high bank of the Dnieper River," the Dragon said. "He is a tanner, and a man so strong that he always soaks no fewer than twelve hides at a time. He soaks them in the Dnieper, and once they have lain in the water they grow very heavy. Now, I have tried catching hold of them underwater once or twice just to see if he could pull them out again and drag them out onto the bank, and he could easily, and me with them if I had let him. The tanner is the one man I stand in fear of."

The princess took this in and she began trying to think of a way of sending news of herself to her father and of getting back home to him. She was quite alone and had no one with her save a pigeon she had reared when still at Kiev and brought along with her. Long thought she and decided to write to her father.

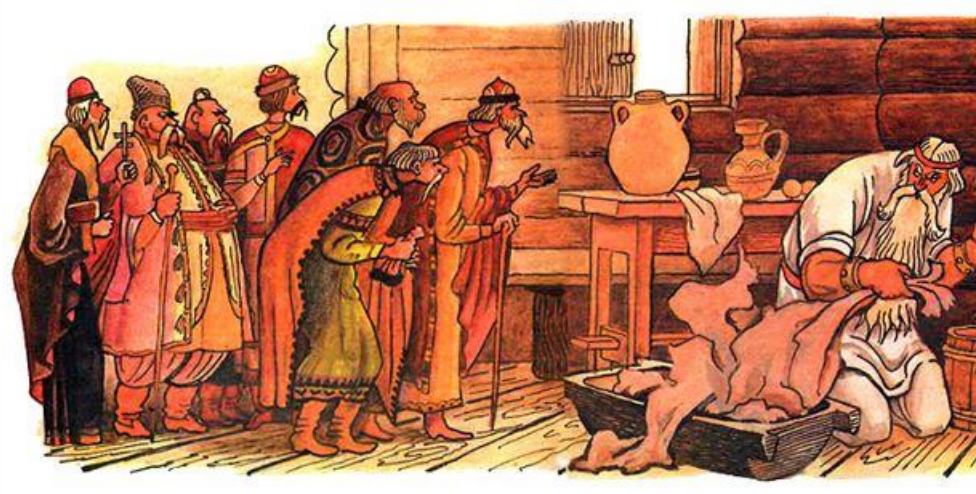






"There is a man in Kiev, Kirilo the Tanner by name," she wrote, "and I beg you to try to prevail on him or have others prevail on him to fight the Dragon and free me, unhappy maid that I am, from captivity. If words will not move him shower him with gifts, and let nobody speak to him save with great courtesy lest he take offence at some turn of phrase. To the end of my days will I pray for you both and ask God to watch over you..."

Having written this, she tied the letter to the pigeon's wing and let the pigeon fly out through the window. The pigeon soared up to the sky and flew straight home. The prince's children, who had been running about in the courtyard, saw it and cried:



"Father! Father! Sister's pigeon is here!"

The prince's heart flooded with joy at the news, only to grow heavy again when he had had time to reflect.

"My child must be dead, killed by the Dragon," he said to himself.

He coaxed the pigeon to light on his hand, and lo! — there was a note tied to its wing. He read it through and at once summoned the elders.

"Is there a man in Kiev named Kirilo the Tanner?" he asked.

"There is, Prince. He lives on the Dnieper's high bank," the elders replied.

"How are we to approach him so that he won't get offended and does as we ask?"

To this they had no answer, so they talked it over and decided to send the oldest of the men of Kiev to speak to Kirilo. The envoys set out at once. They came to Kirilo's hut, opened the door and stood there frozen to the spot. For the tanner sat on the floor, his back to them, twisting and squeezing twelve raw hides all at the same time with his bare hands. They had a glimpse of his snow-white beard bobbing up and down as he worked.

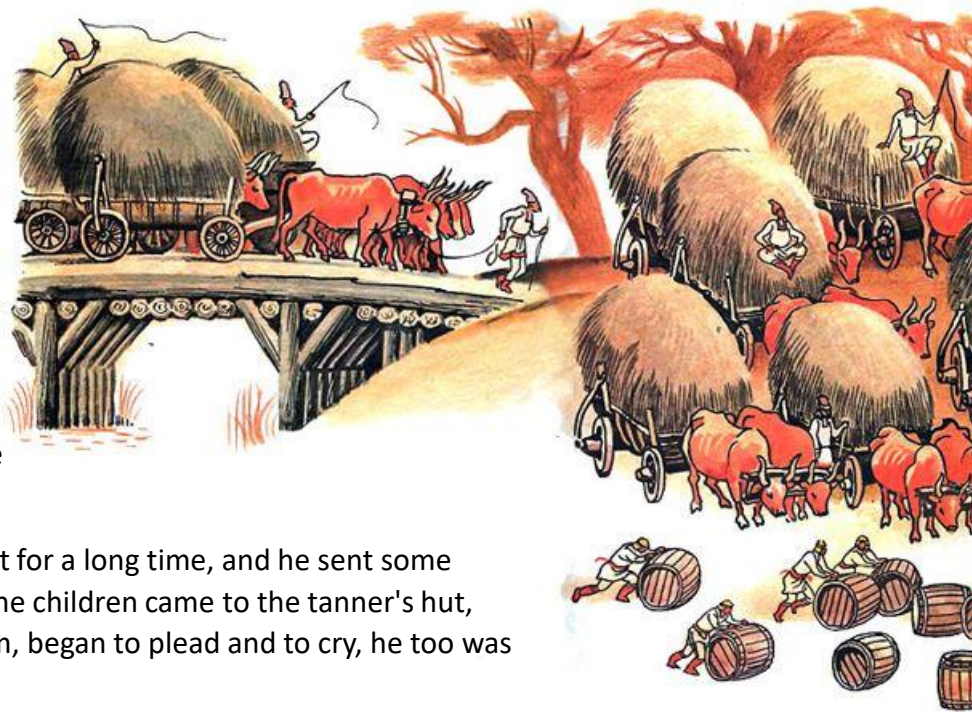
One of the envoys coughed, and Kirilo was startled and twisted the skins so hard that they tore in his hands. He turned and faced the old men, and they bowed low and began telling him who had sent them and why. But so angered was he that he would neither look at nor listen to them. They pleaded and begged and even fell on their knees before him, but all to no avail.

What was to be done?

Back they went to the Prince as sad as sad can be, and the Prince thought for a long time and decided to send the youngest of the men of Kiev to Kirilo.

But the younger envoys did not succeed any more than the older ones had. For the tanner met all their pleas with silence and sat there as dark as thunder.

The Prince thought again, he thought for a long time, and he sent some young children to Kirilo. And when the children came to the tanner's hut, and, falling on their knees before him, began to plead and to cry, he too was moved to tears.





"Very well, I will do as you ask,"  
said he.

He went to the Prince and asked  
for twelve barrels of tar and  
twelve cartloads of tow. These  
were brought, he twined the tow  
round himself and smeared tar  
over it, and, taking a mace that  
weighed all of ten poods, went  
to fight the Dragon.

"Is it to fight me you have come,  
Kirilo, or to make peace with  
me?" the Dragon asked.

"To fight you, you cursed  
monster! Never would I make  
peace with the likes of you!"  
Kirilo replied.





They began to fight, and the earth quaked and rumbled beneath them. The Dragon would rush at Kirilo and make to bite him, and a piece of tar would come away in his fangs; he would rush at him again, and a mouthful of tow would stick between them. And Kirilo would strike the Dragon with his mace and drive him into the ground.



So hot did the Dragon become that it was as though he were on fire. He would run to the Dnieper for a dip and a drink of the cooling water, and the tanner would twine some tow round himself again and smear it over with tar.

Every time the Dragon rushed out of the water and came at Kirilo, the Tanner would wave his mace and strike him with it. The Dragon would come at him again, and again Kirilo would strike him so hard that the sound echoed throughout.



They fought and fought till the smoke rose in clouds and sparks flew all about them. Kirilo's blows came hard and fast, and the Dragon flamed like a ploughshare in a forge. He coughed and spluttered, and the ground trembled beneath him.

The townsfolk watched the battle from the hilltops, and they stood there as if frozen to the spot.

All of a sudden there came a great crash. The Dragon fell to the ground so hard that it quaked and shook. And the townsfolk on the hilltops clapped their hands and cheered Kirilo the Tanner.

The Dragon lay dead, and Kirilo, who had slain him and freed the Princess, now led her to her father.

The Prince did not know how to thank Kirilo enough. And from that day on the part of Kiev where Kirilo lived came to be known as Tanner's Place.

